

University Preparatory English Camp: Perceptions of Its Participants and Instructors

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Abstract

This paper investigated students and instructors' perceptions of a university preparatory English camp for university entering students to show the reality of the camp and finally to provide suggestions for an effective university preparatory English camp. For this, surveys were conducted to measure participant and instructor perceptions of the program. The program for this study was conducted for two weeks in January 2016 during the winter vacation period prior to the student's first semester of university classes. Participants included students from 50 different high schools, who had chosen to attend E University in Korea in the upcoming semester, and five native English instructors. The student questionnaire contained 23 questions categorized as four items and open-ended questions. The instructor questionnaire contained seven items including: the benefit of the program, the least effective thing about the program, technology and materials, scheduling, staffing, opinions on future improvements, and additional comments. This study provides preliminary data in support of the effectiveness of such programs at improving students comfort level with, and general ability of speaking, English at the university level.

Keywords

University Preparatory English Camp, perceptions, camp management

Introduction

There are differing ways that universities in Korea have operated their preparatory programs. However, the common feature of these programs is the desire to create a foundation of basic

academic abilities in order to reduce the knowledge gap between high school and university level courses. For this, some Korean universities provide basic academic courses such as math, science, university adjustment programs, etc.

A large body of research has shown the effects of English Camps, on general language acquisition, to be positive. However, at the time of this study, little research has been conducted on the efficacy of immersive English programs held for incoming university students.

1 Background

1.1 English Immersion Programs

Research shows that English immersion programs were successful, not only in language acquisition, but also in cultural understanding for the program participants (Garcia & Torres-Ayala, 1991; Joo-Kyung Park, 2006; Rha, 2009; Rkfkkin, 2005). However, Swain and Lapkin (1989) found that, while listening and reading comprehension were more developed in immersion programs than in a regular classroom, immersion students were not as competent in the areas of spelling and writing as their peers. Further, Hammerly (1987) reviewed six studies of immersion programs which extended instruction for more than one year. All programs reported results less satisfactory than had been expected.

Given the various forms that immersion programs can take, as well as, their benefits not extending to every aspect of language acquisition, immersion programs have inherent strengths and weaknesses. Since immersion programs are commonplace and relied upon, across Korea, for students at all levels of skill and education, it is imperative to understand all aspects of immersion programs in order to tailor

them to university and student needs. As a result, the University Preparatory English Program (UPEP) used for this study, was designed with a few significant differences compared to typical immersion programs. Specific differences include: timing and stage in the education process, content and material creation and usage, activities, and interaction with native speakers.

1.2 E. University UPEP

During the program planning stage, the Director of the department responsible for running the program established the goals of the program. The goals of UPEP were to expose students to the rigors of a college schedule and production requirements, while at the same time improving their abilities in, and comfort level with, communications in English. UPEP was only two week, six hour per day, program. As a result, the goals for language acquisition were less about quantifiable knowledge, and more about communications skills, primarily speaking and listening and confidence, both in the classroom, and when communicating with a native speaker. With the most focus given to speaking and listening in English, instructor's lessons incorporated, and facilitated dialogues with the instructor, as well as, in groups. Beginner level students were asked to copy a scene from their favorite movie or TV show. Intermediate students were asked to film a reimagining of an old fairy-tale set in modern times. High-Intermediate students were asked to create a unique story.

2. Method

The University Preparatory English Camp (UPEP) was designed specifically for students who anticipated entering E University in Korea in the upcoming semester. A total of 50 students and five native English speaking instructors participated in UPEP during the study period.

A phone-test was used for their placement as well as pre and post tests to measure their speaking and listening abilities. Next, to measure the effects of UPEP the questionnaires were used to find out the perceptions of the students and instructors. Following the completion their final assignment, on the final day of the program, students were given the questionnaire regarding UPEP.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Perceptions of Participants

There were six items which scored an 80% agreement, or strong agreement rating.

- (6) Were the instructors prepared for class and were they enthusiastic? – 98% agree.
- (7) Did the instructors provide good content and proper explanation? – 92% agree
- (8) Were the instructors professional? – 90% agree
- (9) Was the classroom environment pleasant? – 90% agree
- (10) Did the instructors manage the class properly? – 84% agree
- (20) Was the program overall satisfactory? – 80% agree

The participants favored learning English with native speakers and benefited from the instructional methods employed; the participants would have preferred being grouped by proficiency.

3.2 Perceptions of Instructors

“... I don't think it's an effective idea to have both a textbook, and the professor's booklet... I think we should only have the professor's booklet.”

“... the greatest benefit of this camp was that students improved their speaking skills as well as their self-confidence”.

“... students overcame a real fear of speaking in English, which is an excellent preparation for their first semester”

“... the next camp needs to infuse a few more fun elements and reduce some of the seriousness of the final performance”

4. Conclusion

UPEP was generally successful with the students provided clear qualitative evidence that the instructors are a key to making them feel comfortable, while the material used was the key to creating stress and displeasure with aspects of the program.

References

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